



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Chris Abele

MILWAUKEE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

**Milwaukee County Executive Abele's 2012 State of the County
Address**

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As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you Mike for that introduction and to UWM for hosting. I am grateful that Chancellor Lovell has taken the helm at UWM and is an enthusiast for collaborating with the county and others to lead Milwaukee forward. I chose UWM as the site for my first State of the County address to highlight the importance of cross-sector collaboration and to highlight the importance of the many great institutions in Milwaukee working together. UWM is a key component of a healthy Milwaukee County economy and culture, and Mike Lovell's driven and undaunted leadership has undoubtedly been an asset in the face of significant and continued budget challenges from the state. His tireless connecting and collaboration continuously create new opportunities for Milwaukee.

Welcome Mayor, elected officials, distinguished guests and fellow Milwaukeeans.

About 10 months ago, I inherited a government that had ballooning liabilities and a structural deficit, among myriad other institutional issues. Not least among these issues was a culture where good employees -working on providing important services- were under-supported, under-recognized, and lacking the leadership to turn the corner. Problems persisted, oversight and management was inadequate, and county assets and liabilities were only considered piece-meal and with a short-term outlook.

Since I was elected nearly a year ago, I have moved the county forward on many different fronts - and, most critically, with a willingness to make tough decisions. While much remains to be done, I am proud of what my administration has accomplished so far. My administration has begun to change the culture and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the practices of the county. We have worked with the committed leaders of the Behavioral Health Division to

capitalize on their best work and move towards a reorganized and reconfigured provision of quality services that recognizes overlapping mental health and substance abuse needs. We also: achieved a no-deficit balanced budget in a year where the county was left with few tools to fill a \$55 M budget deficit; are reorganizing to improve services, efficiency and integrity; are moving towards reducing the structural deficit; and granted domestic partnership benefits.

I want to talk a little more about this last achievement because it is emblematic of both what I believe in and the importance of moving beyond our attachment to the status quo. While there was certainly a strong opposition to creating domestic partnership benefits, the costs realized in 2011 were far less than budgeted and certainly far less than the fear-mongers would have us believe. And while I'm proud of getting this far, this is not an end point. Marriage equality in the state of the Wisconsin. It's time. We should judge people by their character, their work, and their moral integrity. Let's show the rest of the country what Wisconsin really is.

Much of what has been achieved is possible thanks to the leaders who have joined my administration. With the goal of creating sustainable and effective services, I have brought top talent to face our most important missions in the county. Many of my Cabinet are also in attendance, and I am grateful for your commitment to provide services more effectively and more efficiently. This is not a small task, and I am happy to have you with me working every day to make your work a source of pride for your employees, your customers and our community. Pat, I especially appreciate your fearlessness in ensuring the integrity of the county government.

Many of the technical changes we are making - like centralizing procurement - are part of our effort to strengthen the integrity and accountability of the county. The Comptroller bill - which creates an independently elected person that can act similarly to what those in the private sector consider a CFO - and thereby decrease the politicking surrounding financial analyses - is just the beginning of my administration's focus on the integrity of county government.

Milwaukee County employees are some of the most dedicated and hard-working people I have ever had the pleasure of leading. Too often they have been unfairly criticized and blamed for the financial challenges of Milwaukee County. I am proud of the great work they do and look forward to working together to transform the reputation of the county so that we can all serve the citizens of Milwaukee with pride and respect for years to come.

Economic development and job creation is a priority for everyone right now. For too long, the county had been a bit player on that front. I said we were going to change that and we have. The new department is far more organized, bipartisan and appropriately staffed than it has ever been. The communication and coordination with our friends at the city is more frequent and productive than it has ever been, and that will continue and expand as we continue to build our presence and connection with any entity or individual who can help further the cause; from WEDC and the governor's office, to local business associations. We want to be a persistent presence at every chamber of commerce, every business association, and every municipality. We want to be connected and aligned with the schools, universities, and non-profits who train and develop the work force and the employers who need it to grow. We want to know the banks, venture funds, and investors who finance growth, as well as the incubators and entrepreneurial programs who catalyze it. We want to stay aware of the best practices of other cities and counties around the country and put ourselves in a position to be setting them. The reason we will be doing all of this is not to lecture or to limit, but to listen and lift. We want to be driven by a relentlessly 'can do' culture, armed with as broad a knowledge as possible of not just the tools and incentives that we have at county but what we can offer together, and a willingness to share information, help connect and facilitate, and to proudly advocate for Milwaukee.

As an example of how our approach has changed and how we will collaborate and seek out any and all tools available to us: the package we put together for Kohl's is by far the biggest package the county has ever offered for any business. And that was our first try out of the gate. We were willing to give away the land – about \$12 MM worth, provide access to 1000 discounted or free bus passes for a year, waive fees at our brown field land fill for excavation of contaminated land, use our bonding to pay for the relocation of up to \$5 MM of public infrastructure, and provide a discounted hanger space at the airport, along with prominent signage there and elsewhere.

And to learn from Kohl's decision and to make sure we're ready for the next opportunity, I have tasked the county's Director of Economic Development to work with the Department of City Development Commissioner to create a Park East Advisory Workgroup. This group, which I am announcing this morning, will draw on the expertise and perspective of local developers, commercial real estate professionals, business leaders, as well as county and city officials. Their sole focus will be understanding how we can creatively leverage the assets the city and the county have to create and implement a plan that will attract jobs and vitality to the Park East Corridor.

For an opportunity to attract net new jobs to the county at that scale, we will be aggressive. The tools we have to do it here are limited only by our creativity with what we control and our drive to get things done. When we do that in partnership with the city and the state, together we can be a driving force for jobs. If the WEDC, the M7, or MMAC has a big opportunity, I will tell you right now that the county will be an enthusiastic partner. For a big opportunity like Kohl's, we will knock down mountains. And make no mistake; we don't plan on waiting for opportunities to just arrive in our laps. We want to make sure that we - all of the entities who share an interest in growing the economy in Milwaukee - are always actively targeting the industries that are most complementary to our strengths and that we grow our reputation as a place where businesses seek to locate. We don't need to 'own' that process, but we will make sure that it is always being owned by someone. Confidentiality, creativity, flexibility. Get used to it, there will be more.

I also want to take a moment to reassure everyone that I take public safety very seriously. We have a responsibility to protect our citizens that I take very seriously. But it is time to prioritize and focus on disciplined decision-making and transparency in every area, including this area which continues to make up about half of the county's tax levy. Leveraging these public safety dollars to achieve public safety requires leadership. Leadership in a democracy is about our shared mission to steward the resources of our citizens. Leadership is not about announcing to everyone who you're angry at or publicly insulting other public servants. It's also not about encouraging unchecked anger and fear.

If you believe there are problems - offer a solution and respect, not just accusations. If you're the media, hold us accountable but don't encourage fear in the absence of data and context. Our community deserves reasoned and intelligent dialogue about the important choices we face - based on facts and data not politics, hyperbole and melodrama.

The Community Justice Council is one body that furthers thoughtful dialogue on public safety in a way that should make us all proud. The Community Justice Council is leading commendable and groundbreaking efforts to collaborate -the county, city, Sheriff, Police Chief, Chief Judge, State Department of Corrections and Department of Justice are all active players on the Council - and to use data to make better criminal-justice decisions, reduce incarceration, hold down costs, and make the community safer. As the Public Policy Forum has framed their work: "I have rarely seen this level of collaboration and this thoughtful an attempt to just step back and take a systemic examination of an important piece

of local government.” This exemplary leadership and dialogue is just the kind of decision-making I hope to make more systemic in our county government.

Sometimes, in the increasingly partisan noise that seems to dominate the airways these days, we forget what government is for, and what it can be. We are all lucky to live in such a vibrant, rich and livable place and your government should reflect and support that vitality.

I have a lot I look forward to achieving at the county - including moving the county towards fiscal sustainability, increasing the quality of services provided, addressing deferred maintenance in a serious way, and leading this community to shine.

I ran for County Executive because I love Milwaukee and am proud to call it home. I believe in a Milwaukee that is a destination for residents, business and workers. I believe in a Milwaukee that has a strong and vibrant economy that has earned a reputation as a great place to build a business and get things done. I believe in a Milwaukee that empowers ALL of its citizens, provides opportunity for ALL to education, work, low cost of living and incredible quality of life. I know we can get there and I won't give up.

I can't promise I'll get everything on my plate done. I will promise that I will work very hard to move your county government forward and to show the state and the country what a turnaround looks like.